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ABSTRACT

This monograph examines issues relative to the awarding of academic credit to out-of-school youths for work experience and training programs designed by prime sponsors or their contractors with local education agencies under the Youth Community Conservation and Improvements Projects, the Youth Employment and Training Programs, and by the Department of Agriculture and Interior for the Young Adult Conservation Corps. The first of five sections defines and describes competencies in four categories which may be addressed through work experience. Three ways to approach the granting of academic credit for work experience are presented in section 2: program evaluation for credit, credit for prior experience, and experience designed for credit. Section 3 discusses four specific factors that must be considered in experience programs designed for credit: (1) integration in a total learning program, (2) site analysis, (3) identification of competencies, and (4) appropriate assessment techniques. The fourth section focuses on implementing the program and developing prime sponsor/LEA written agreements outlining the approach. Following the conclusion, a list of programs and contracts available for further information is provided. (LRA)

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The Awarding of Academic Credit Under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977

U.S. Department of Labor
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INTRODUCTION

The Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA) of 1977 states in Section 355(b):

> "The Secretary of Labor. . .shall work with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to make suitable arrangements with appropriate State and local education officials whereby academic credit may be awarded, consistent with applicable State law, by educational institutions and agencies for competencies derived from work experience obtained through programs established under this title."

The Congress fully intended that arrangements be made with State and local education officials so that academic credit would be given for the skills and knowledge acquired through work experience that would deserve credit if learned through traditional schooling or in other ways. In referring to "competencies," the intent was not to limit recognition narrowly to job skills but also to basic skills of language and mathematics and to a knowledge of society and how to assume responsibility in it. The credentials that may be earned in these programs of work experience and training will recognize "competencies" in occupational skills and in the areas of traditional education as well.

The provision of academic credit for competencies derived from the various programs funded under the Act is strongly encouraged. The greatest emphasis in this paper will be placed on the awarding of academic credit to out-of-school youths for work experience and training programs designed by prime sponsors or their contractors with local education agencies (LEA's) under the Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects (YCCIP) and the Youth Employment and Training Programs (YETP. and by the Department of Agriculture and Interior for the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC).

In YACC, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, will, in cooperation with LEA's, work together to develop the specifics for awarding credit for the competencies derived from participation in conservation work projects. It is expected that students enrolled in in-school programs under the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP), YCCIP, and YETP will receive credit through existing work-study, career education or other school programs, particularly those established under the Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) programs. Prime sponsors and local education agencies are, however, strongly encouraged to expand these arrangements and to test additional models wherever appropriate.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the issues with regard to the awarding of academic credit. During the past several years, much attention and debate have been concentrated on different methods and techniques for awarding academic credit for competencies derived from out-of-classroom experiences. No single method has emerged as the best for assessing or awarding credit. Therefore, this paper will merely suggest some of the issues and options relative to academic credit and identify the resources available for further information.

I. What are the competencies?

There are many competencies that can be achieved through work experiences. Different work experiences can be designed to develop single or multiple competencies and thus earn credits in specified subject areas. It has proven difficult, however, to equate the competencies acquired through experience or independent study with the same qualities attributable to a high school diploma. Of these, the General Educational Development Tests (GED) is the most common, but the Competency Based High School Diploma and the New York Regents External Diploma Program claim certain advantages, particularly for adults. Although the

traditional diploma varies from school to school and from person to person within a school, in general, a high school diploma testifies to some measure of competence in the following categories, each of which may be addressed through work experience as indicated:

A. Basic Skills in Language and Mathematics.

Language and mathematical skills are the bulwark of traditional education; however, "grade level" has been repeatedly challenged as a measure of practical performance. The Competency Based High School Diploma, for example, looks less to measures of grade level and more to a demonstrated ability to reach "adult-performance levels" as defined by such practical applications as the ability to apply for a driver's license or enter into a rental agreement. The local education agency and the prime sponsor therefore have considerable latitude in agreeing upon diploma requirements for basic skills measured either by standardized tests or by practical applications. Similarly, the agreements can be expected to vary considerably in the amount of basic skill learning that is required from the work experience itself. Often the work experience is only expected to stimulate a desire to acquire the skills needed to do a job well, and the training itself is provided by tutoring or classroom work. But in either case, language and math competencies can be viewed as "derived" from work experience.

B. Coping Skills. Central to the ability to cope with life and work problems are:

> interpersonal skills--the ability to interact effectively with a variety of people (friends, colleagues, family, associates, business and governmental employees) in order to obtain information, transact business, or receive assistance;

problem-solving skills--the ability to define problems, identify possible solutions, and choose a course of action; and inquiry skills--the ability to get, analyze, and use information for different purposes.

Dependability, following instructions, work productivity, making friends, and other coping skills -- all are qualities that are learned in traditional schools through course work, extra curricular activities, and sports and through other ways of working together and sharing responsibilities. In work experience programs, objective ratings by supervisors supported by records of attendance and performance, are probably the best basis for attesting to at least minimum levels of coping competence.

C. Occupational Skills. Academic credit that is earned for competencies of an occupational nature are an obvious valid predictor of work performance for that occupation.

In the absence of assessment measures of proven validity, the best available measure of an occupational skill at the entry level is that identified by the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. A number of performance tests for measuring job skills have been developed by the vocational and trade schools, apprenticeship programs, and Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) work sample programs, and the national testing services.

D. Liberal Education "Competencies". These competencies have to do with a knowledge of society and how to deal with it. They should, along with coping skills and basic skills in language, provide at least a partial foundation for later expansion of personal horizons.

While there are some recently developed measures of these "social perspective" skills, these are largely untested and the agreement between CETA sponsors and educational agencies with respect to liberal education competencies may do little more than describe the orientation that will be provided to help the trainee place the work assignment in a social context and to examine his/her obligations to employer, labor organizations, and to the community. This orientation might, for example, be incorporated as an explanation of the issues connected with payroll deductions for health care, social security, or union dues. The "orientation" to the job could, however, become a comprehensive liberal education program if it were to examine in greater detail the issues of democratic governance of business or labor organizations. Competency in this general area of citizenship may be measured, at least initially, by simple knowledge tests or through interviews by counselors or work supervisors although neither measurement has much proven validity as a predictor of citizenship activities. In any case, the identification of the types of competencies that can possibly be learned at any given site should be carefully considered. Variability cannot be avoided. Some sites will provide much more opportunity for a richer learning experience than others. This fact must be considered so that the proper balance of the amount and kind of credit that will be awarded to students is fair and realistic.

II. Suggested Models for Awarding Academic Credit

CETA prime sponsors and local educational agencies (LEA's) must agree on whatever procedures are adopted to award academic credit for competencies derived from work experience in these programs. There is considerable controversy concerning the methods for awarding credit and on the meaning of academic credentials. Still, 4 out of 5 high schools as well as a growing number of colleges, or other post secondary institutions and accrediting agencies give academic credit for learning through experience. CETA/LEA arrangements for awarding credit should generally look first to these established local practices.

There are generally three ways to approach the granting of academic credit for work experience. They are:

- Program Evaluation for Credit
- Credit for Prior Experience
- Experience Designed for Credit

Depending on the purposes of the program, these are all acceptable alternative modes of granting credit for work experience. CETA prime sponsors and LEA's should explore the advantages and disadvantages of each as they reach agreement on the most appropriate local alternatives.

Combinations of alternatives might be considered, depending upon the target population to be reached by the program. It should be pointed out that none of these methods in any way implies the dilution of academic credentials or the random granting of credit for the acquisition of insignificant skills. They do, however, build upon the needs of many individuals who learn better outside the classroom in the areas of reading, writing, and other basic skills and further provide the means for learning and maturation in other skills (e.g., coping skills, career exploration). A brief description of each method follows.

A. Program Evaluation for Credit

In this model, a total program of work experience (work site plus other related activities) is evaluated by experts for its ability to provide the opportunity for the learning of competencies. Youth in the program are granted credit for having attended the program or work experience for a length of time (i.e., 1 year at work might be equivalent to 4 Carnegie units in academic subject areas.)

1. Advantages - This is a relatively simple method for awarding academic credit. A rigorously organized work program can be approved by appropriate local experts in a relatively short time, although the program should be monitored at intervals to ensure that the quality of the learning opportunity is maintained.

2. Cautions - Evidence that particular competencies have been learned is assumed since individuals normally are not tested independently for competencies. In the absence of testing, care must be taken to monitor and otherwise examine the work experience to assure that it is continuing to provide the skills for which it was designed.

This model is a good choice if the quality of any work program can be guaranteed; however, it does not allow for the assessment of individual competencies to assure that expected competencies have been learned.

B. Credit for Prior Experience

In this model, an individual is evaluated on specific or general competencies whether learned in or out of school, as long as they are school-related. Demonstration of competence, whether by proof or by performance, is the basis for the award of academic credit. There are already numerous ongoing programs that reflect this model, such as the credit by examination offered in many community colleges and universities or credit given for military experience (Servicemen's Opportunity College). Furthermore, this model is often applied by employers who hire individuals either on academic credentials or the experience equivalent.

1. Advantages - For older youth who have some experience(s), this method is useful because it awards credit to them for past performance or proof that they have learned competencies they can already perform that are judged to be related to school curricula. This method of awarding credit for experience depends on gathering evidence of learning by using a variety of assessment techniques.

2. Cautions - The array of techniques possible in this mode require more sophisticated methodology and is time-consuming. However, because it relies heavily on individual assessment, it will permit far greater focusing of instruction on experience since these can then be directed specifically to the participant's individual skill level.

C. Experience Designed for Credit

In this model possible competencies to be learned are identified explicitly and an individual student is evaluated on performance. This model can be closely controlled and the learning experience integrated with academic course work.

1. Advantages - Experiences structured in this model have a specific purpose that is clearly identified and related to the individual's overall learning program. Experiences are carefully structured and designed to meet these needs. Pre - and post-testing of the individual can be conducted to verify attainment of competencies as a result of the work experience.

2. Cautions - Each work site must be carefully analyzed to identify all possible competencies that might be learned in the experience so that the anticipated skills are in fact acquired. This takes some degree of skill and time and significant costs may be involved.

As has been noted, each model has distinctive characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages. Since the third model, Experience Designed for Credit, to some degree, combines elements of the preceeding two models, it will be presented in greater detail.

III. Specific Considerations in Experience Designed for Credit

A quality program in which a work experience is designed for academic credit must be concerned with three key factors:

- integration in a total learning program for the individual;
- site analysis;
- identification of competencies that might possibly be learned there; and
- appropriate assessment techniques to determine if the competencies have been learned.

As indicated in Part I, there are a number of competencies that may be acquired through well-structured work experiences.

Although it is not possible that any one work site will provide the opportunity for learning the variety of competencies that are offered through traditional academic course work, a complete analysis of the learning possibilities at any one site is extremely important in order to assure that the competencies can be attained and unrealistic expectations can be avoided. Management of the work experience is the key in assuring that experiences at the work site are an integral part of an individual's learning program and that work site supervision is of high caliber. Moreover, the full potential for experiences designed for credit can only be realized when the CETA prime sponsor and local education agency not only selectively identify existing sites but also actively develop new sites or revise existing ones.

In structuring a program for awarding credit for work experience, prime sponsors and LEA's must:

1) agree upon the objective(s) of the learning programs of which the work experience will be a part;

2) agree upon the relationship of the identified competencies to local degree and diploma requirements;

3) Identify specific learning outcomes or competencies that might be learned at the particular learning site;

4) Establish for proper documentation of the experience as a basis for awarding credit;

5) Develop adequate measurement of identified learning outcomes or competencies according to preestablished standards; and

6) Develop procedures for recording the learning outcomes or competencies.

Both the prime sponsor and LEA should analyze the numerous learner coordination, site analysis and management functions that need to be carried out to effectively implement such a program. There is no set formula for assigning responsibility for performing these functions because program and staffing constraints will require different solutions. Both the Far West and Appalachian Regional Education Laboratories have done extensive work in analyzing these functions.

Once competencies have been identified, assessment becomes particularly important. In order to determine whether a work experience has in fact imparted the skills that it was selected to provide, assessment of the individual should be considered both prior to and after participation. There are numerous choices that can be made about the most appropriate techniques for assessment of the experience designed for credit. Because of the wide variety of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may be desired learning outcomes worthy of credit, the characteristics of several types of assessment techniques for the measurement of competencies are described below:

A. Objective written exams. Content oriented tests in familiar formats, e.g., multiple choice, true/false, or completion-type exams may be used. Obvious advantages of this type of examination are its ease of administration and scoring; however, individuals who have dropped out-of-school, or are drop-out prone, often find such tests intimidating and they should therefore be used carefully.

B. Essay exams. Essay exams may be particularly useful for presenting areas of knowledge in written format and for evidence of use of communication skills. The caution cited in "A" above would however also apply.

C. Performance tests. Performance tests may include either hands on tests in controlled situations or obstrusive observation in natural settings. They might also include the work sample method, in which a representation of a task that one might encounter on the job is presented. Advantages of these types of tests are their obvious insistence on application of skills and knowledge. Disadvantages are primarily in terms of costs and the need for trained assessors for evaluation.

D. Simulations. Simulations create real-life situations such as case studies, management games, inbasket problems. This is a good technique for testing problem-solving and decisionmaking abilities, management and interpersonal skills, attitudes and oral communications. Advantages are that more complex interactions of skills and attitudes can be observed. However, difficulties in the techniques include costs in personal time, facilities needed, and the need to repeat the observations to assure reliability.

E. Interviews. Interviews can be structured or unstructured with individuals responding to open or closed questioning, or through panel interviews with students interacting while being observed by experts. Advantages include emphasis on verbal communication skills and the efficiency of small group testing. Care must be taken to establish assessment criteria for validity and consistency.

F. Ratings. By an agreed upon expert, ratings are evaluations by either a job supervisor or a teacher. Checklists and rating scales can be used to measure skills, attitudes, and knowledge competencies. Advantages include quantitative judgements where it is difficult to obtain more objective measures of competence, but disadvantages include tendencies to subjectivity and biased rating behavior. An essential element of managing work experience programs for credit is continuing integration of what happens on the work site with the learning program.

G. Self-assessment. Self-assessment refers to self ratings on detailed performance checklists. To be most useful, it can be validated with job supervisors or teachers.

H. Product assessment. Product assessment refers to evaluations of student product(s) against defined academic criteria. It has the advantage of providing concrete examples of performance for judgement. Disadvantages are time and costs involved in conducting such an evaluation.

I. Assessment by Documentation

There are also a number of assessment techniques by documentation which are used for determining competencies derived from experience. The External High School Diploma Program is an example of such a technique. Assessment by documentation is particularly useful for older youths who may have been involved in activities where competencies were learned and for which credit may be awarded. While these techniques are used predominantly for crediting prior experience, many may be appropriate for assessing experience designed for credit. Briefly, such documentation takes these forms:

1. By Credential. Where a current license is already possessed by a learner, it represents evidence that particular competencies have been mastered. For instance, barbering and cosmetology licenses can be obtained in New York State by non-high-school graduates, and is acceptable evidence of learned occupational skills.

2. By Examination. Through examination, demonstration of general or subject matter information can be translated to academic post-secondary course equivalents. Commonly accepted tests are the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS); tests used in particular States (New York State Proficiency exams, the Regents External Degree Program); or tests developed by the Military. Examinations prepared by faculty from a particular college department can be used, as well as faculty evaluation by indepth interview. At the secondary level, the General Educational Development (GED) test is the most widely accepted such examination.

3. By Performance. Documentation and evaluation can be achieved by using experts who assess skills through watching the participant's performance (e.g., generator repair) or reviewing products (e.g., portfolios of art work or photography, or carpentry).

4. Letters of Recommendation. Summaries of field experiences may be corroborated by job supervisors who could analyze the specific responsibilities which can be given academic course equivalents.

5. Credit for Practicum Experience. Credit can be granted for length of service where it is relevant to some academic offerings. Either paid or volunteer work in areas such as teaching, scouting, nursing, or business experience are a few examples. For instance, New York State gives 4 months credit for 1 year of service at any acceptable activity.

6. Military Experience. Courses and experience given by the military have been evaluated for recommendations for credit. Information is available from the American Council on Education, Office of Educational Credit.

7. Documentation of On-the-Job Learning Activities. Credit is given for onsite courses obtained through business and industry after evaluation according to the guidelines available from the New York State Education Department.

The assessment techniques described above can be examined for their usefulness in each model. Each technique can be used effectively, so long as its strengths and limitations are recognized. Prime sponsors and LEA's should also consider using combinations of these techniques.

IV. Implementation Considerations

A. First Steps

For youth who are not enrolled in a full-time program leading to a diploma, a degree, or a certificate; arrangements should be made between CETA prime sponsors and LEA's for assessment of the competencies derived from work experience and for the awarding and recording of the credit that the participant accrues. The participant may be considered as being enrolled in a part-time program leading to a credential, and the credit earned may be banked toward the award of the credential at sometime in the future.

To maximize the opportunities for youths to earn academic credit, the prime sponsor and LEA may choose to:

- rotate youth through various work experience sites which offer different kinds of appropriate creditable learning experience; or

- design the work experiences in stages, so that before progression to another stage occurs, competencies can be assessed and credit awarded or placement maintained at that phase until the competency is acquired

Through use of the assessment by documentation techniques or others, YEDPA participants may be assessed for competencies already acquired and credit awarded by a local education agency. This would then make it possible to place participants in work experiences which will earn them the additional credits needed to earn a high school diploma or post-secondary credits or credentials.

The choice of the most appropriate model--whether program evaluation for credit, credit for prior learning, or experience designed for credit--depends upon a variety of factors to be discussed by prime sponsors and LEA's. Regardless of the choice or combination of models that may be agreed upon, the factors below should be considered:

Nature of the program and/or work site and the identification of the possible learning outcomes associated with the site;

→ Relationship and articulation of these outcomes to local diploma requirements;

→ Costs and time involved in setting up the most appropriate array of assessment procedures and the short- and long-term benefits of each;

→ Training needs of available personnel to administer and develop such assessment techniques;

→ Validity and reliability of the measurement techniques;

→ Characteristics of the youth population to be served;

→ Establishment of standards for performance that are realistic, achievable, and fair to the average student;

→ Identification of who will award the credit; (Some States permit only high school teachers who are credentialed in the subject area, be it English, math, or business education, to award students credit in that area. At the post-secondary level, the issue may be one of degrees as well as credentials. In California, for example, community college instructors must have masters degrees in their field as well as community college teaching credentials) and,

→ Applicable State laws.

Also, of significant note is that the learning potential of a site depends as much upon the people there as it does with the function and activities of the job the student fills. Questions need to be raised such as: What do the worksite staff know and what are they willing to share with students? How well do they interact with young people? Were the individuals drafted to participate in the program or did they volunteer?

Competence may not always be measurable, and as noted earlier, may have to be inferred from the amount of time invested in work experience and an agreement reached as to the quality of the experience offered. But, where possible, competencies should themselves be measured.

B. The Prime Sponsor/LEA Agreement

In developing programs for awarding academic credit for competencies derived from work experience, prime sponsors and LEA's should develop a written agreement outlining their approach. While it can be expected to vary considerably from place to place depending upon the emphasis local agencies wish to place upon the several methods for measuring competence and the local resources available (e.g., experience in working with one or more of these methods), all can be expected to include statements of agreements on the following considerations and techniques:

> Wherever possible, measurement of the competencies actually derived by the participant rather than by assessment of work experience that is expected to develop certain competencies;

> Identification of measurements and credentials that will affect employment and advancement. These should be valid predictors of later work performance;

> Specification of minimum levels of competence of the several kinds required for a credential and identification of the several means of measurement, e.g.:

a definition of each individual competence for which academic credit is to be given whether it is a basic skill, a coping skill, a vocational skill, or a more general academic competency; for example, the agreement might state that academic credit will be given for the improvement in reading that occurs as a result of the work experience and associated training.

the criteria by which competence is measured, e.g., the agreement might say that competence will be measured by a particular test or technique discussed in this paper.

the standards (or degree of improvement) required for academic credit, e.g., the agreement might specify reading level or types of material that might have to be read in order to meet requirements for a diploma for a specified number of school credits. It might also specify that academic credit would be awarded in increments for measured progress towards the level required for graduation; for example, a participant may have already accrued 2 years of credit in English towards high school graduation. Academic credit representing 1 year of secondary school might, by agreement, be awarded for progressing half-way from the participant's entry level to that required for graduation.

the method of reporting, e.g., the agreement might state that within a specified time of completion of work experience, the level of competence would be measured, the student notified, credit awarded, a notation of the award made in the participant's personnel record.

Similarly, for vocational skills, the agreement should specify the definition of the skill, the criteria by which it is to be measured, and the standard of competence required for awarding a diploma, certificate, or degree. Academic credit would be awarded for progress towards that standard as greater competence is derived from the work experience and associated training.

V. Conclusion

CETA sponsors must work with local educational agencies to decide upon the best ways to award academic credit for the competencies derived from work experience in these programs. With the help of planning councils and youth councils and through cooperation between prime sponsors and local educational agencies, YEDPA can do much to assure that the best of the systems for awarding credit is instituted.

Prime Sponsors are further encouraged to pursue additional approaches for the award of academic credit for work experience. Such activities could be an important part of the sponsor's knowledge development efforts and, as such, can be expected to contribute to building an information base for furthering national policy development.

Programs and Contracts for Further Information

The resources listed below are available for additional information and guidance on the award of academic credit for experience. The programs and contacts are organized by model as discussed in the text of the document.

Model A: Program Evaluation for Credit

Secondary level:

Frederick Coury, Director
The City as a School
131 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201
(212)858-1004

Postsecondary level:

Jack Kain
American Council on Education
Office of Educational Credit
1 Dupont Circle, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036
(202)833-4700

(The American Council on Education is completing a feasibility study on evaluating apprenticeship training for college level credit under contract with the Department of Labor. The findings will be available after January 1978.)

Model B: Credit for Prior Experience

Secondary level:

Dr. Mary Reis
New York Regents External High School Diploma Program
Bureau of Adult Education
New York State Department
Albany, New York 12224

Ms. Elaine Sheldon
Texas Competency Based Diploma Program
University of Texas
Extension Division
Austin, Texas 78712

(In these programs, the traditional Carnegie unit used in most high schools is not the standard for the credit.)

Postsecondary level:

Jean Titterington
Director, Office of
Academic Credit
Thomas A. Edison College of
New Jersey
Forrestal Center
Forrestal Road
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
(609)452-2977

This is a completely external degree college. Students in this program may earn credit through any one or a combination of: 1) enrolling in courses in other institutions; 2) testing; and 3) individual assessment of prior learning.

Model C: Experience Designed for Credit

Secondary Level: Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) (There are four EBCE models and four regional educational laboratories supported by the National Institute of Education.)

Karen Pfiffer
Appalachia Educational
Laboratory (AEL)
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325
(304)344-8371

Virginia Thompson
Northwest Regional Educational
Laboratory (NWREL)
710 S. W. Second Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503)248-6822

Ralph Baker
Far West Laboratory (FWL)
1388 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103
(415)565-3130

Jesse Turner
Research for Better Schools
(RBS) - Suite 1700
1700 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
19103
(215)561-4100

A publication, Update: Experience-Based Career Education News is published quarterly by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, California through support of the National Institute of Education. Update contains up-to-date information and models on EBCE programs. For copies, write the regional educational laboratory nearest you.

Postsecondary level:

Marilyn Stolee
Director of Off-Campus Learning
Alverno College
3401 South 39th Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
(414)671-5400

Diane Bamford Rees
Executive Associate
CAEL
American City Building
Suite 208
Columbia, Maryland 21404
(301) 997-3535

The Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) can provide additional contacts, expecially at the postsecondary level. CAEL is a membership association for postsecondary institutions. Some 300 institutions are members. CAEL serves as a national clearinghouse of individuals and printed resources in experiential learning. Their publications are available at a nominal cost by writing to the address above.